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S E C R E T MANILA 005316

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SECDEF/OSD/ISA/AP FOR ALLEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/14/2015

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SUBJECT: AFP ENGAGES ABU SAYYAF TERRORISTS ON JOLO

Classified By: (U) Political Officer Paul O'Friel  
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) In a significant combat operation, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) units engaged Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) terrorists on the island of Jolo over the weekend of November 12-13. The AFP initiated the operation, which involved Task Force Comet and elements of the 104th Brigade, 3d Marine Brigade, Philippine Air Force, and the Philippine Navy, to capture/kill a key ASG sub-commander, Dr. Abu, in the vicinity of Mt. Tumatangas.

2. (C) Despite torrential rain and steep terrain, AFP units maintained contact with the terrorists. The heavy fighting left 21 AFP soldiers wounded in action and four dead. The AFP believes the ASG suffered significant casualties, but we have not been able to confirm these estimates independently.

3. (S/NF) Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) liaison elements provided intelligence support and advice at the battalion-level and above during the operation. JSOTF-P was not involved in the planning phase of the operation until it was well underway, and was, therefore, unable to assist in developing its more detailed aspects.

4. (C) COMMENT. The AFP fought credibly on difficult terrain and in austere weather conditions, maneuvering to and maintaining contact with enemy forces. While suffering casualties of their own, they continued to press on and remained in the field. The SOUTHCOM Commander, LTG Adan, appears committed to pursuing the ASG, and has reportedly instructed the Task Force Comet Commander to keep up the pressure, with the goal of capturing senior ASG targets before the end of December.

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